Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Proceedings of the National Charter School Authorizers and Sponsors Symposium



Portland, Oregon
March 24-26, 2003

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presented by

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
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Prologue

The rich diversity of the nation's nearly 2,700 charter schools shows that there's no one way to do charter schools. In fact, freedom of choice lies at the very core of the charter school movement with legislators able to mold charter laws to fit their respective states; operators giving form to their highly individual visions; and parents free to choose the academic model that best meets their child's needs.

The lack of a "one size fits all" pattern also extends to charter authorizers or sponsors, the entities legally responsible for granting the charter or contract that allows schools to obtain funds and operate. In some states, only local school districts can sponsor charter schools. In others, an array of possible sponsors might include the state board of education, the governing board of a university, or even a specially formulated charter school board.

No matter who drives the decision, he or she is often traveling without a road map. In most cases, legislation establishing charter schools—often drafted by noneducators—lacks a set of directions for sponsors to follow. While that leeway can be viewed as a license for innovation, it can result in wide variation in the quality of authorizing practices and, ultimately, in the success or failure of the charter schools themselves.

Recognizing the need to explore the complex role of authorizers, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) convened a symposium in Portland, Oregon, on March 24–26, 2003. A national cross-section of sponsors, researchers, state officials, and professional association representatives was invited to participate in a wide-ranging discussion of the substantive issues that authorizers face. Participants came from 15 states and from organizations as diverse as the New Jersey Department of Education, Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, Florida State University's Charter School Accountability Center, and the 21st Century Schools Project in Washington, D.C. (For a complete list of attendees and contact information, see Appendix).

During the three days, the 32 experts debated everything from accountability to the degree of technical assistance the authorizer should offer. They wrangled over the tough issue of ensuring high standards while avoiding standardization. And, they brainstormed about the contents of an ideal toolbox that sponsors could dip into at various stages of the authorization process.

Stirring up the pot of charter school discourse is not a new role for NWREL. In 1996, the Laboratory hosted an invitational Northwest Symposium for Charter School Policy. At that time, only 500 charter schools were operating around the country, and only two Northwest states had charter school laws on the books.

That conference, summarized in proceedings entitled *Charter Schools at the Crossroads: A Northwest Perspective*, positioned NWREL as a leader in providing sorely needed resource materials for a movement that was growing by leaps and bounds. NWREL produced a series of *Charter Starters* workbooks in 1999 that are still in demand, along with research monographs on key issues, a media guide for charter school founders, and a video on handling community relations issues. The Laboratory staff continues to conduct trainings nationwide for prospective charter school operators and evaluates state programs as well as individual schools.

By organizing the March 2003 symposium and publishing its proceedings, NWREL's aims are twofold:

- To add to the body of knowledge about authorizing practices
- To help create effective tools for supporting and strengthening such practices

The overarching goal is to produce better-run public schools of choice and ultimately increase student achievement.

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Complexities and Contradictions Facing Authorizers

Ask a group of charter school authorizers to explain their role, and you could get as many different interpretations as the blind men describing an elephant in the familiar Indian fable. As the six men grab a different part of the elephant—its side, tail, tusks, trunk, knee, or ear—each conjures up a distinctly different animal. Depending on which part charter authorizers emphasize, they're also likely to have a different view of reality.

Some authorizers see their task as scrutinizing applications, while others believe in offering ongoing technical assistance. Some are comfortable setting policy, while others worry about quashing creativity or creating the type of bureaucracy that charter schools were designed to counter in the first place. There's even disagreement over whether to call themselves authorizers or sponsors, neither or both. Some states use one label exclusively. Critics of the term "authorizer" argue it implies chartering is a one-time event.

Symposium organizer Joyce Ley of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory uses both titles. "I have used those terms interchangeably," she told the group in the opening session. "We view authorizers as sponsors and as such, believe they have responsibility for providing ongoing oversight and support for charter schools to be successful." At the same time, Ley admits that "there's no one magic answer" for what the roles and responsibilities of authorizers should be.

Identifying Key Issues

Many of the participant experts agreed, however, that ongoing oversight is one of the most important tasks authorizers face. In a preconference survey, invitees were asked to identify the issues they grapple with and rank them on a scale of 1 (low importance) to 6 (high importance). Oversight topped the list with an average rating of 4.6. Other concerns, in order of importance, are the roles and responsibilities of authorizers (4.3); charter contract/performance (3.8); agency capacity and infrastructure (3.0); the application process (2.9); and renewal decisionmaking (2.6).

The results echo the findings of researcher and charter school pioneer Joe Nathan of the Center for School Change, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. Nathan—one of the featured speakers at the symposium—described the key issues for the sponsor/

authorizer. They include sharing information about the charter idea and providing information to prospective applicants; assessing charter proposals; selecting some proposals and giving feedback to others; monitoring charters that it has sponsored and determining whether to renew those agreements after a period of years.

Nathan also views the authorizer as advocate, strengthening public education in the area it serves. "If you look at the states that haven't done outreach, that's where charter schools are stymied," he said. "We need to focus on promoting cross-fertilization and alliances that strengthen not only charter schools but education overall."

Building Excellence

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is one organization throwing a lifeline to authorizers through resources and training on practical issues. Now in its third year, the organization was started by authorizers who felt like they were working alone and wanted to band together to share their experiences. "Early on, the focus was on the school and the level of accountability of organizers, teachers, and parents," said NACSA representative William Haft. "Authorizers had to depend on trial and error." Even now, notes Haft, states don't provide much guidance to authorizers, although California and Idaho are beginning to buck the trend.

Haft described a number of initiatives that NACSA is carrying out as part of a two-year research program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. A Web-based Library of Charter School Authorizer Resources (www.charterauthorizers.org/pubnacsa/library) is a clearinghouse for resources, policies, protocols, and tools used across the country. *Transparency Design Issues for Charter School Authorizers* (www.charterauthorizers.org) offers tools for making authorizing and oversight processes more visible to the public. *Critical Design Issues and Illustrations for Charter School Authorizers* poses a series of questions that authorizers should consider during the planning process, along with case studies illustrating different approaches. For more information, contact info@charterauthorizers.org.

To Assist or Not?

"There's no right way to do this (authorizing)," Haft told the group. "It's a matter of applying guiding principles." By way of example, Haft touched off a lively debate by asking his audience to respond to the statement: "Authorizers should/should not consider technical assistance as part of their responsibility and role."

The answers to the question were as varied as the states represented in the room:

- "You have to look at, do you have the resources? In the case of Wyoming, we don't, so we need networks."
- "In Arizona, there are so many charter schools that you need to leverage resources, focus on what you can do, and do it well."
- "In Florida, school districts are mainly the authorizers. (Some of us) are getting together to come up with technical assistance rules that we can take on the road."
- "In states where you have multiple sponsors, there are different forms of technical assistance. We (in Minnesota) don't want districts to provide TA because the whole reason for charters is innovation."
- "The laws in many places require it. But you have to be careful that you don't get into a liability issue where operators come back and say 'you told us to do this.'"
- "I'll provide assistance, but I won't write the application (for the operator). If they can't write one themselves, how are they going to run the school?"

Along with the issue of whether or not to provide technical assistance, participants wrestled with the very definition of it. As John Rothwell of Cincinnati Public Schools observed, "Technical assistance has so many meanings as to be meaningless."

Despite the different perspectives, the majority at the symposium believe that authorizers should provide technical assistance along with a high degree of "transparency" so everyone clearly sees and understands what the process includes. The reason is the overwhelming desire to see charter schools succeed. As one participant put it, "I can't ask them to hit a target when I hide the bull's-eye."

Still, many advised discretion. For example, an authorizer should feel comfortable providing assistance in areas that are governed by law, like discipline, civil

rights, or special education, but shy away from offering help with curriculum. "I respect (charter schools') independent status," explained Sonia Vazquez of Florida's Osceola County School District, "but I'm here to provide help on the side." Paul Haubrich of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside cautioned, "If you get too close, too involved in a program, you can't be as objective as the law requires you to be. Once you've gone too far with technical assistance, it's your program—not theirs—and your role as an authorizer has been compromised."

Joe Nathan asked the group to examine a third option, besides whether or not to provide assistance. "Consider if there's any other authority in the state, what the laws say, and what the philosophical orientation is," he advised. To support his stance, he gave the example of the U.S. Supreme Court, which has an interest in the law, but doesn't offer technical assistance to lawyers appearing before the bench. By publishing its decisions, the Court provides guidance for future cases. Similarly, a city council awards millions of dollars in contracts but doesn't assist its contractors. However, it does make sure someone is monitoring how those dollars are spent.

The Birth of Charter Schools

The phenomenal growth of the charter school movement is a testament to its great success. But, as Joe Nathan points out, "There's no idea so good it can't get messed up." In the interest of putting the symposium's deliberations in context, Nathan retraced the birth of charter schools from the vantage point of one of the midwives.

The nation's first charter school legislation emerged from some scribbles on a napkin at a conference sponsored by the Minneapolis Foundation back in 1988. As Nathan remembers in his book, *Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education*, two speakers at the conference planted a seed that sprouted in unexpected ways. Sy Fliegel, a charismatic educator from East Harlem, and Albert Shanker, the fiery late president of the American Federation of Teachers, called for allowing more school choices and developing policies that let teachers create them.

Their directive was seized upon by Nathan, a former teacher, and four colleagues: a Minnesota state senator; a PTA president; and two community advocates. Together, they drafted the groundbreaking law that was finally adopted in 1991, becoming the nation's first charter school legislation.

Since then, public schools of choice have grown like Jack's beanstalk with almost 2,700 schools serving 684,495 students in more than three dozen states during the 2002–2003 school year. One reason for the explosion is that charter schools have been embraced by both ends of the political spectrum. "On the left, it's appealing because you're expanding opportunity," said Nathan, "and on the right, it's a good investment."

The movement—named for the royal charters granted to European explorers—continues to break new ground. Although charters vary widely from Minnesota to Mississippi and Alaska to Florida, they are basically contracts that spell out expectations and responsibilities of both the authorizer/sponsor and the operator. Most embody one or more key principles that Nathan articulated:

- An exchange—greater flexibility in *how* a school operates, in exchange for greater *responsibility* to improve student achievement. Schools would be freed from most state regulations and from local labor/management agreements.
- Multiple sponsors—more than one organization would be allowed to create or "sponsor" public schools.
- An explicit contract setting out expected results—the contract or charter would have a term of 3–5 years.
- Schools would be *public*—nonsectarian, open to all, and with no admissions tests. These qualities distinguish charters from vouchers.
- Schools could be conversions or newly created schools.
- Teachers would have a chance to participate. They would be allowed to take leaves from existing districts and would be treated as public school teachers for purposes of statewide pension plans.

In Nathan's state of Minnesota, more than 40 different organizations now serve as charter school sponsors. In a recent study, conducted by Nathan and Laura Accomando, sponsors report a number of advantages from their work with schools. The most frequently cited benefits are improving academic achievement for students and increasing educational options for families. At the same time, sponsors are concerned about the amount of time required to do a good job, and the possibility of bad publicity.

What's been learned from the varied experiences of Minnesota's charter school sponsors? Nathan and colleague Nicola Johnson offer some answers in *What Should We Do? A Practical Guide to Assessment and Accountability in Schools.* The guide examines both charter and district schools, listing vital features and valuable features in successful assessments. The study is available online (www.centerforschoolchange.org) and in hard copy, by request.

Special Education and Civil Rights Issues

Special education is only one piece of the charter school puzzle, but it has big implications. According to national expert Eileen Ahearn, "It is the federal mandate that each charter school must pay attention to, but despite that, special education is often given short shrift in schools' applications." She notes, "The charter school can pay no attention to special education, but it's a problem when it's a problem. The first time it comes up, it can overwhelm the school."

Ahearn, Project Director at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, told symposium participants that it's critical for charter schools to know their legal identity because that determines their level of responsibility for special education. Each charter school is either an LEA—Local Education Agency—or part of an existing one that has total responsibility for the children in a geographic area.

In some states, such as Arizona and North Carolina, each charter school is an independent LEA while other states, like Connecticut, view special education as a partnership between the school and the child's LEA of residence. In California and Washington, D.C., the charter can elect whether it is an LEA for purposes of special education. Being responsible means that the charter school is entitled to funding, but it also must meet the child's total needs.

In a study of how special education is handled by charter schools in a number of states, Ahearn found a continuum of arrangements or linkages between schools and districts, with wide variety even within a state. Project SEARCH ("Special Education as Requirements in Charter Schools") also uncovered policy tension between charters and special education around issues of autonomy versus regulation and parental choice versus team-based decisionmaking. Successful strategies for handling special education include oversight by the state's special education administration, negotiation training, and exchange visits.

Monitoring is a huge part of the special education equation, Ahearn noted. She pointed out that, in accordance with federal requirements, all states have a procedure in place to ensure special education is implemented in all LEAs.

Ahearn's organization is now working on technical assistance materials that will provide information and allow charter schools to take advantage of existing tools. Three primers—for operators, authorizers, and state officials—will help make special education more manageable at all stages of the life of a charter school from application to renewal. The materials will be available in print and

will be developed into a Web-based training program; for more information, contact eahearn@nasdse.org.

Ahearn also affirmed charter schools' responsibility to comply with federal civil rights laws. Charter schools, like all public schools, must not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability in any of their programs or activities. However, a charter school may take race into account in making admissions decisions in limited circumstances. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, race may be used "only in a narrowly-tailored way to meet a compelling interest, such as to remedy discrimination, to promote the educational benefits of diversity, or to reduce minority-group isolation."

Assessing National Practices

The first indepth, cross-national look at authorizing policies and practices was being readied for publication at the time of the NWREL symposium. Researcher Louann Bierlein Palmer of Western Michigan University shared some of the preliminary findings, as well as the methodology involved in the study of 555 charter school operators, 114 charter school authorizers, and 191 charter school observers in two dozen states.

According to Bierlein Palmer, the study found that states that use local boards in a "wholesale fashion" don't fare as well as those with other authorizing entities. "The reasons are twofold: one is the continued conflict over the question of 'should we charter our own competition' and the second is a lack of infrastructure," asserted Bierlein Palmer. She said one of the "surprises" of the research was that "a couple of states, like Arizona, where we think horrendous things are going on, (we find) they're not." Also, she discovered that a number of states don't even know how many authorizers they have because their state education agencies take a hands-off policy with regard to charter schools.

Bierlein Palmer believes the study's criteria—which fall into the categories of state charter school policy environment and charter school authorizer practices—will generate discussion. Also, they provide a starting point for states that want to continue research on their own. But, she added, "Unfortunately we don't have adequate data to answer the question 'does quality authorizing result in quality schools?'" The study, funded by the Walton Family Foundation and published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, can be accessed at http://www.edexcellence.net/tbfinstitute/authorizers.html.

Dealing With Real-Life Circumstances

Lack of clarity, inadequate funding, and hostility between authorizers and schools are all problems that the charter world routinely deals with on the journey toward student achievement. Symposium participants offered examples of "real circumstances" that have thrown roadblocks in their way, along with the things that could have helped them steer clear of hazards:

- Uneven quality of applications—Complaints in this category ranged from ambiguous and permissive laws to a lack of set standards for applications. Authorizers thought it would be helpful to "take politics out of the decision" by having independent authorizing boards.
- Institutional opposition—This circumstance is made more difficult by developers' deficiencies and by consultants who take advantage of the authorizing process. Political support and state academic standards would be useful in this area, along with providing tools to teach parents about market forces, networking, and clarifying issues of autonomy versus oversight.

- Poor evaluations—Participants stressed the need to identify deliverables: what kinds of outcomes do we want in charters? However, one authorizer pointed out, "If the list of criteria is too long, you may discourage the 'mom and pops.'" Most agreed that clear models of accountability, more thorough legislation, and money to implement the law would contribute to better evaluations. Seeking legal counsel and using business leaders and other experts in the field as reviewers were also seen as desirable.
- Oversight—Problems are created when local districts are given oversight of charter schools that have been turned down at the local level and then approved by the state through the appeal process. "We need clearer direction from the legislature as well as mediation tools," remarked one school official.
- Application process—Many authorizers have experienced or observed problems in judging the quality and "authenticity" of applications and their budgets. To combat that, it would be helpful to have a checklist of questions about curriculum, governance, and realistic funding levels. Sponsors would like to see more "solid organizations" and 501(c)(3) nonprofits apply for charters.
- Reinventing the wheel—Although a number of resources already exist, authorizers don't always know where to find them. Consequently, many fear that they're continually "reinventing the wheel." To avoid that, symposium participants asked for a coordinated list of Web sites dealing with issues such as authorizer practices, personnel policies, the implications of NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act), and different federal and state regulations.

One other circumstance that provoked considerable discussion was the lack of funding for sponsors. "There's a cost to authorizing, and someone has to pay for it," observed Louann Bierlein Palmer. She noted that some states now charge authorizer fees of 1–10 percent. Joe Nathan suggested that authorizers seek clarification of whether part of the 5 percent set-aside in federal grants to state agencies could be used for authorizer expenses.

Nathan also made a strong case for seeking perspectives of those inside and outside education when dealing with charter issues. "We've learned over the last decade that it's valuable to have different points of view," said Nathan. "Consider having people who are in small business administration review your materials."

Others suggested additional resources, from both inside and outside the educational community. The list includes the Charter Friends National Network (now called the National Charter School Alliance); intellectual capital at the district level, such as superintendents and senior staff; mediation tools; school board associations; the business community; other local districts that serve as mentors; application review teams made up of educators, businesspeople, and community leaders; NWREL's *Charter Starters*; state academic standards and assessments; and the Web site, www.uscharterschools.org.

Constructing a Toolbox

Just as building a sturdy house requires a well-equipped toolbox, so does developing a charter school that will withstand the pressures and scrutiny of parents, educators, politicians, and other community stakeholders. Symposium facilitator Elke Geiger asked attendees to "draw on your successes and mistakes" to construct a toolbox that would help new and experienced authorizers become confident craftspeople.

Brainstorming in small groups, conference participants compiled the following "wish list" of top tools:

- A dictionary of terms so everyone going to the toolbox has a common understanding
- A federal laws toolkit with requirements pertaining to civil rights, special education, health and safety, and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)
- Self-assessment and needs assessment tools enabling sponsors to clarify their roles and determine what information they need to fulfill their responsibilities

- An authorizer road map or template of the entire authorizing process with resources plugged in along the way
- A database of technical assistance providers
- A checklist covering ongoing oversight with special education mandates and NCLB embedded
- A document that makes the application process more transparent or understandable
- State-by-state descriptions of sponsor roles
- A list of questions to ask and things to consider during the application process and when making decisions on renewal and revocation

Other desirable tools include geographic/demographic surveys that help authorizers pinpoint "gaps" and encourage charter schools where they're needed; a one-stop shop that gives the public everything they need to know about sponsors, schools, and authorizers; a way to determine the applicant's corporate status and if that changes once the charter is granted; and a Web-based authorizer resource center, organized by a key-word index.

One participant suggested a tool that explains how to work with legal counsel, saying, "They should work for you rather than telling you how to run things." Another popular suggestion was a thorough public information packet that explains the role of the authorizer and charter schools to the press and the community. The aim would be to inform the public "so they see charter schools as something that positively contributes to public education."

In recapping the session, NWREL's Joyce Ley pointed out recurring themes such as fear of reinventing the wheel and concern over "institutional resistance or animosity" between charters and school districts. The problem of poorly written applications also kept popping up. Participants wondered if a lack of clarity in guidelines was to blame or simply a lack of quality in applicants. In the end, said Ley, "The quantity and quality of charter schools is of utmost concern because of their role in leading innovation and reform of traditional education."

Looking Ahead

As British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli pointed out, "In a progressive country, change is constant; change is inevitable." While one can only guess how the charter movement will change over time, there are always hopes and dreams. What is the one thing symposium participants would like to see happen in the next five years? Not surprisingly, most say they'd like to see charters fulfill the promise of accountability.

Lyle Skillen of the Arizona Department of Education hopes for "greater accountability, both fiscally and academically." Others agree that there should be true performance-based accountability for all schools, with charters driving that goal for traditional schools.

Less hostility between local districts and the charter world is another dream. Participants suggested that this could be accomplished through more cohesion within the charter world itself, uniting to get across the message of who they are and what they represent.

While everyone wants to make sure charter schools have the necessary resources to flourish, one official believes "we (authorizers) need the right to fail." She added, "We don't have to make sure all schools are successful because the failures could provide us with valuable lessons that will result in stronger charters."

Some hopes for the future were narrow, such as an exemption from the No Child Left Behind Act. But others took a more global approach, dreaming of charter school legislation that returns to the core components of the original concept and governing boards that are more knowledgeable. Perhaps the most all-encompassing wish was also the simplest: "Do what's best for kids and all get along."

Next Steps

The National Charter School Authorizers and Sponsors Symposium was merely a beginning. Now, the journey starts. NWREL staff will compile an executive summary of the major points of the conference and seek feedback from a larger group of authorizers. "We want to ask 'did we hit the mark?'" says Joyce Ley. "After that, we'll examine policy briefs to see what the research says about the issues we've identified."

The next order of business is to design a development plan for an authorizer's toolbox. Creating the tools is envisioned as a collaborative project. According to Ley, NWREL will seek input from a broad range of partners, from educators, universities, and state agencies to organizations serving minority interests, construction firms, bond rating companies, elected officials, other educational laboratories, and faith-based organizations.

Some tools may already exist while others must be built from scratch. In all cases, the tools will be offered as samples or ideas rather than cookie cutter models. After all, as conference participants pointed out, charter schools are all about innovation rather than standardization.

"We hope the symposium and its proceedings will have some dynamic impact," Ley concludes. "By capturing and building on the brain power we've gathered in this room, we can create a blueprint for moving forward."

AGENDA

PORTLAND, OREGON • MARCH 24-26, 2003

Monday, March 24

11:00–12:00	Sign In/Registration
12:00–12:30	Working Lunch
12:30–1:00	Welcome to NWREL—Jerry Kirkpatrick Symposium Overview
1:00–1:30	Introduction of Symposium Participants
1:30–2:00	National Association of Charter School Authorizers William Haft
2:00–3:00	Discussion of Key Issues—Small Groups
3:00–3:15	Break
3:15–4:15	Report Out
4:15–4:30	Adjourn Day One

Tuesday, March 25

8:30–8:45	Recap Conversation
8:45–9:00	Welcome & Day Two Overview
9:00–10:30	Issues Panel—Joe Nathan, Center for School Change, Univ. of Minnesota Eileen Ahearn, National Association of State Directors of Special Education

Tuesday, March 25 (continued)

10:30–10:50	Summary of Authorizer Study—Louann Bierlein Palmer, Western Michigan University
10:50–11:00	Break
11:00–12:15	Building the Toolbox
12:15–1:15	Working Lunch
1:15–2:45	Building the Toolbox *continued*
2:45–3:00	Break
3:00–4:30	Processing the Toolbox
4:30	Adjourn Day Two

Wednesday, March 26

8:30–8:45	Recap Conversation
8:45–9:15	Welcome & Day Three Overview Taking Care of Business: Claim Submissions Summary of Yesterday's Activities Overview of the Day Overview of *Charter Starters*
9:15–10:30	Which Tools Should We Develop First?
10:30–10:45	Break
10:45–11:45	Where Do We Go From Here?
11:45–12:00	Recap
12:00–1:00	Working Lunch & Adjourn Symposium

Symposium Presenters

Eileen M. Ahearn

Eileen Ahearn is Project Director with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. Prior to joining the association, Dr. Ahearn had more than 20 years of experience in Massachusetts as a teacher and administrator in special education and general education, culminating in the position of superintendent of schools in a K–12 district. She also designed, implemented, and served for eight years as the Executive Director of a service collaborative that provides special education programs, staff development, and business services to 13 public school districts in central Massachusetts.

Since 1991, Dr. Ahearn has conducted research and policy analyses of special education issues for federal, state, and local administrators and policymakers. She directed Project SEARCH, a three-year study of special education in charter schools under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Under a national initiatives grant from the U.S. Department of Education Charter Schools Office, she is now directing the SPEDTACS Project to provide technical assistance on special education for charter school developers, authorizers, directors, and others involved in the design and operation of charter schools.

Louann Bierlein Palmer

Louann Bierlein Palmer is a faculty member in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at Western Michigan University. Formerly, Dr. Bierlein Palmer served as the Education Policy Advisor to Louisiana Governor Mike Foster; Assistant Director of the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University; a legislative research analyst with the Arizona Senate; and a national educational reform consultant. She began her career as a middle school science teacher.

Dr. Bierlein Palmer has spent the past decade working with national and state policy leaders and educators on a number of education reform initiatives, including programs for at-risk children, school restructuring efforts, classroom technology, school accountability systems, and creating more options for teachers and students through charter schools.

William Haft

William Haft is currently Associate Director of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and has also served as NACSA's Interim Director. He is responsible for the development of programs to improve authorizing practices, including oversight and evaluation of charter schools by charter authorizers. Previously, Haft was a teacher, administrator, and soccer coach for eight years at an independent school in Colorado. Between teaching and joining NACSA, Haft graduated from Harvard Law School, clerked for the Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, and was an attorney in the Education and Government Affairs practice groups at Hogan & Hartson, LLP, in Washington, D.C. He has published several law review articles on education issues, including charter school reform.

Joe Nathan

Joe Nathan, senior fellow, directs the Center for School Change, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. The Center seeks to help transform public education and to produce significant improvements in student achievement. Dr. Nathan has been a public school teacher and administrator and coordinated the National Governors Association education reform project, *Time for Results*. His most recent work involves strengthening rural communities to help increase student achievement and reduce violence. His specialty areas include parent and community involvement, school choice, charter schools, and youth community service.

Dr. Nathan has testified before 20 state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. He regularly publishes commentaries in major U.S. newspapers and has appeared on several hundred radio and television programs. The American School Board Journal named his most recent book, *Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education*, one of the seven best books written about education in 1997.

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CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS SYMPOSIUM

MARCH 24-26, 2003

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Electronic Resources Referenced in Symposium Proceedings

www.centerforschoolchange.org
The Center for School Change is a program of the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. The Center works with educators, parents, businesspeople, students, policymakers, and other concerned people throughout the United States to increase student achievement, raise graduation rates, and improve student attitudes toward learning, their schools, and their communities. It also focuses on strengthening communities through building stronger working relationships among educators, parents, students, and other community members.

www.charterauthorizers.org
The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is a nonprofit membership association of educational agencies across the country that authorize and oversee charter public schools.

www.edexcellence.net/tbfinstitute/authorizers.html
This link leads to *Charter School Authorizing: Are States Making the Grade?,* a recent publication by Louann Bierlein Palmer (Western Michigan University) and Rebecca Gau (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University). The report, published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, is the first major effort to examine U.S. charter school authorizing practices and policy environments, with a special focus on 24 states. It includes a list of authorizers by state.

www.uscharterschools.org
This comprehensive Web site, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and developed by WestEd, contains state directories and resources.